# MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

# Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney

JANUARY 26 TO
FEBRUARY 28
1943

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
TEN WEST EIGHTH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

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*Camera Study by Jean de Strelecki*

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT WHITNEY

# *INTRODUCTION*

ONLY a few pieces of sculpture by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney have hitherto been shown in the Museum which she founded. Two examples have served as decorations to the interior architecture of the building and occasionally she has exhibited in the annual surveys of American art. I mention this because of the light it throws upon her personality, for she was a woman of great modesty, her innate sense of propriety made unthinkable the exploitation of her position in the Museum for furtherance of her reputation as a sculptor. She sought no favors and asked only to be accepted on equal terms with her contemporaries as a professional artist.

Forty years ago the boundaries of the social world of which she was a part were more restricted and the sphere of activities open to women more circumscribed than they are today, so that it took considerable determination to seriously undertake, in the face of prejudice and scepticism, the career of the sculptor.

As a child she had shown a natural plastic gift. She commenced the study of art under Hendrik C. Andersen and James Earle Fraser and at the Art Students League in New York. Later she was a pupil of Andrew O'Connor in Paris. It was there that her work attracted the interest of Rodin, who gave her private criticism. The influence of that master's style upon her work is less apparent than in that of almost any other sculptor of her generation for she was early to formulate her own individual way of working. In 1917, upon the occasion of her first exhibition, Royal Cortissoz was quick to recognize this quality of independence when he remarked, "We do not know under whom she has studied, and it is to be counted to her credit that her works offer no evidence on that point. One group the 'Paganism Immortel' suggests that she

has been attracted by Rodin's subtle modeling, but if she emulated it in that marble, she has not persisted in the path then followed . . . her strength lies altogether in a straightforward handling of realistic forms; she aims at the truth and gets it."

The group referred to by Mr. Cortissoz was one of her earliest works, dated 1907, and appears in the present exhibition under the title of "Paganism." "Boy With Parrot" and "Pan" done in 1905 represent the beginnings of her work as a sculptor. Tentative as these first essays may be they are marked by qualities which persisted to the end, an interest in subject directly and firmly stated, a nervous vitality of modeling, which an emotional intensity was capable of lifting above a simple transcription of reality to a plane of lyric expressiveness.

After years of study had been rewarded by an increasing technical mastery, Mrs. Whitney felt justified in considering the days of her apprenticeship to be over. Up until this time she had been working in an atmosphere of seclusion and she now felt the need of stimulation afforded by closer contact with other artists and with the life of the work-a-day world of the studios. So in 1907 she moved to a new studio in Macdougall Alley, which was to be the scene of her activities as an artist for the rest of her life.

In these preparatory years she had never faltered in her determination to become a professional sculptor, but doubt cast upon her seriousness of purpose, she was later to acknowledge, was a considerable psychological handicap at this stage of her progress. In her new environment she found in her fellow artists, who themselves had obstacles of another sort to overcome, a ready sympathy, and her natural talent and capacity for hard work won their immediate respect. How she repaid this friendliness and understanding belongs to another chapter in the story of her life.

The wisdom of the change she made at this time in her artistic environment was fully justified by the effect it had upon her sculpture, for the approach to her work was one of renewed enthusiasm and assurance.

After she had been at work only a year in her new studio, she was accorded recognition in a wider field when she won the sculptural award in a competition called a "Project of the Three Arts" given by the Architectural League of New York for the best design made in cooperation with an architect and a mural painter. Mrs. Whitney's contribution was the figure "Pan." A study of this figure appears in this exhibition.

After this award many successes were immediately to follow. She was represented in the St. Louis Exposition, and at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 her fountain of three figures was awarded the Bronze Medal. A version in bronze of this fountain, which adorns the entrance hall of this building, is known to thousands of visitors to the Museum. Among other works of this period she had completed a more purely decorative fountain of Aztec motif for the Pan-American Building in Washington. In that same year, 1912, The Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased her "Spanish Peasant." All these were notable accomplishments for a woman still in her middle thirties with little more than ten years experience as a sculptor.

Productive as these years had been and indicative of steady growth, it was in 1914 that Gertrude Whitney was to reach the heights of her powers as an artist. It was then that her craftsmanship and sensitivity to human values were united in the creation of the monument which now stands in Washington to commemorate the victims of the sinking of the Titanic. Unfortunately, the study of this figure in plaster, which is included in this exhibition, can only hint at the impressiveness of the finished monument. But there does come through to us something of the poignant feeling and originality in the conception of this allegory of heroism and sacrificial death.

The war had touched her deeply and was to have a profound influence upon her life as an artist and as a woman. The figure of her Titanic monument was later to symbolize the personal tragedy of the death of her brother who perished with the sinking of the Lusitania. Before this sad event occurred she had given largely of herself in many ways, among others by organizing exhibitions in her studio as benefits for war sufferers and by donating an entire motor unit to the American Field Service in France. Her most notable contribution, and one that was to have the most direct bearing upon her sculpture, was the establishment in 1914 of her own hospital at Juilly, France, where she maintained a staff and 225 beds. At this time the base hospital at Juilly was the closest to the front lines and the months spent in the war zone brought her into direct contact with the bitter realities of that other war.

This experience was to change the course of her sculpture for the next ten years. The decorative elements that had lent charm to her work up until this time were swept aside by the intensity of her desire to express in the most direct and realistic terms some of her feeling for the tragedy and heroism of war.

The character of these vivid impressions which had formed an exhibition

in her studio in 1919 were epitomized by Guy Pène du Bois when he wrote in a Foreword to the catalogue " . . . she threw masses of clay together in the shapes of men, men who were not merely men, but men at war, men enveloped in the chaos of a mad dream, given their character by it, and then reality—and unreality."

Out of these studies, based upon direct experience, came such war monuments as the Washington Heights Memorial and the panels for the Victory Arch in New York. The culmination of this series of monuments was the soaring figure that rises, and that one can only hope still rises, high above the harbor at St. Nazaire, where the first contingent of American troops landed, a symbol of the spirit that sent our men to France in 1917.

Mrs. Whitney devoted most of her energies in the 1920's to the monumental sculpture already referred to and to other works of a variety of subject matter and inspiration. One of the most notable accomplishments of this time was the "Buffalo Bill." The exhibition contains a reduction of this statue which was Mrs. Whitney's first equestrian group, and in it her knowledge of horses and their riders resulted in a spirited and convincing monument to the famous Western scout.

Another achievement of this period embodied in heroic proportions one of her greatest conceptions, the monument to Columbus which dominates the harbor at Palos, Spain, where the great navigator set out on his voyage of discovery. This inspiring edifice is projected in truly monumental forms of the utmost simplicity. The figure of Columbus which rises to a height of 114 feet is not intended to be an individualized portrait, but, in keeping with the majestic proportions of the whole monument, is rather a generalized concept of man's courage and faith in the eternal conquest of the unknown.

The only personal and individualized portions of this monument which were to be seen at close range were the corner bas-reliefs and the isolated group which stands in the chamber at the base of the monument. "Ferdinand and Isabella" represents this latter detail in the present exhibition, and we must depend upon a reproduction in the catalogue to gain some idea of the imposing dignity of the monument as a whole.

After the completion of this sculptural and architectural triumph, Mrs. Whitney spent the following years in many diverse activities as a sculptor. Among the works included in this exhibition, typical of her mature style, are the simply designed "Gwendolyn" and "Mother and Child," and the sensitively

felt and rendered portrait of her brother, General Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Her last two important works were the monument to Peter Stuyvesant which stands in Stuyvesant Square and the "Spirit of Flight" designed for the World's Fair in New York, 1939-1940.

These two pieces, which were to be the last work from her hands, sum up her whole life as an artist and serve to bring into focus some of her salient characteristics as a sculptor. By their diversity they exemplify her amazing range in subject matter and treatment. A sound knowledge of the human figure and an instinctive sense of the significant gesture could result in the solidly constructed figure of the earthy Peter Stuyvesant, or could enable her to create, with equal felicity, figures of such lyric eloquence as the imaginative "Spirit of Flight."

This last work brings her life as an artist to a fitting close, for she has, in these soaring figures, projected her spirit forward into space to symbolize her own enduring courage and faith in the future.

During the execution of these commissions Mrs. Whitney's health had not been good, and after their completion she found the effort involved in her work as a sculptor placed too great a burden upon her strength and she thereafter spent less time in her studio to withdraw more closely within the circle of her family and friends.

Though prevented in these last two years from continuing the practice of her own art, she maintained her usual interest in the work of others and gave herself with undiminished enthusiasm to the many activities which had long been associated with her name. Indeed up to the last she carried on her life in much the same way as before and gave little outward evidence of failing health.

So that in the Spring of last year when she was suddenly stricken it came as a particularly grievous blow to those close to her, and when after an illness of only ten days the end came on the morning of April 18, 1942 the whole world of art experienced that bitter shock and shared that sense of loss.

* * * * *

Mrs. Whitney would have wished an Introduction to this retrospective exhibition of her sculpture to be confined to the salient facts of her life as they concerned her work as an artist. I feel bound, by the memory of her reticence, to refrain from touching upon the more intimate side of her life. The beauty that she brought to her personal relationships was best known to her family

and to her closest friends. But even upon the most casual acquaintanceship there was revealed the gentleness and warmth of a nature that lay behind the reserve and natural dignity of her manner.

There is another expression of Mrs. Whitney's personality that was closely bound up with her life as a sculptor, and in a larger sense as creative — her devoted efforts in behalf of American art, through recognition and encouragement she gave to her fellow artists.

At the outset of her own career in 1908 she opened two galleries adjoining her studio for the exhibition of the work of her contemporaries, and it is interesting to note that, with characteristic modesty, it was not until eight years later that an exhibition of her own sculpture was to be held in this place, which was known as the Whitney Studio Galleries.

In these early years her hospitality was extended, as it continued to be throughout her life, not only to painters and sculptors of established reputation but to the unknown artist of talent as well. Besides bringing their work before the public she aided the artist in another way, for by means of acquisitions made on a liberal scale and with discriminating taste, she began the accumulation of her now famous collection.

This intelligent and far seeing policy was to take other forms in the years that followed and was to be extended to ever increasing proportions, but the essential principle in back of those manifold activities was to remain the same.

Her vision was to be brought closer to fulfillment when in 1931 she founded the Whitney Museum of American Art, providing a home for her extensive collection and, most important, giving a new impetus to a vital idea. Implicit in this idea was the element of growth. Mrs. Whitney, upon the occasion of the opening of her Museum, expressed this thought when she said: "I am making this collection the nucleus of a Museum devoted exclusively to American art — a Museum which will grow and increase in importance as we ourselves grow."

Though she is no longer with us her ideals remain to participate in our cultural life, to give form and coherence to the art of our time and country and to help us shape the world that is to come.

It is appropriate that this Museum which is a symbol of her faith in the future should now contain this exhibition of her sculpture. Together they form a fitting memorial to the creative achievements of a gifted artist and of a wise and generous woman.

JULIANA FORCE

# *BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE*

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT WHITNEY was born in New York City, ~~April 19, 1877~~ Jan 9, , daughter of Cornelius and Alice Claypoole (Gwynne) Vanderbilt. She married Harry Payne Whitney August 25, 1896.

She received her training in sculpture under Hendrik C. Andersen and James Earle Fraser and at the Art Students League in New York, and later was a pupil of Andrew O'Connor and Rodin in Paris.

She contributed to important exhibitions in this country and abroad and held one-man shows in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, London and Glasgow, Scotland.

Among Mrs. Whitney's monumental sculpture and other important works standing in public places are the following:

Washington Heights War Memorial, 168th Street and Broadway, New York City, commissioned by the Inwood and Washington Heights War Memorial Committee.

Titanic Memorial, Potomac Park, Washington, D. C. The winning design in a competition sponsored by the women of America to commemorate the heroism of the men who went down on the Titanic in 1912.

Monument, St. Nazaire, France, presented to the Republic of France by the St. Nazaire Association with funds raised from all parts of the United States to mark the place of the landing of the first contingent of the American Expeditionary Force in 1917.

Equestrian statue "Buffalo Bill" at Cody, Wyoming, commissioned by the Buffalo Bill Association.

Monument to Columbus at the port of Palos, Spain, erected by the Columbus Memorial Committee, a gift to Spain by popular subscription from all parts of the United States.

Aztec Fountain in the Pan-American Building, Washington, D. C.

Fountain, Peru. Presented to that government by the American Society of Peru. A replica on the campus of McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Mrs. Whitney is represented in private collections and in The Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and in the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris.

She has received the following awards and honors: Honorable Mention, Paris Salon, 1913; National Arts Club Prize, 1914; Bronze Medal, Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915; Medal of the New York Society of Architects, 1922, for her design of the Washington Heights War Memorial as the most meritorious work of architectural sculpture for that year; Medaille de la reconnaissance from the Government of France; Grand Cross Order of King Alfonso of Spain; Medal, American Art Dealers Association, 1932 "for distinguished service in the cause of American art"; National Sculpture Society Medal, 1940 "for distinguished contribution to the advancement and recognition of the art of sculpture."

In recognition of her achievements as a sculptor she was awarded honorary degrees of M.A., New York University, 1922, and Tufts College, 1924; Doctor of Fine Arts, Rutgers University, 1934 and Doctor of Humane Letters, Russell Sage College, 1940.

She was a member of the National Academy of Design (Associate), American Federation of Arts, Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, National Arts Club and the National Sculpture Society.

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney died April 18, 1942 in New York City.

# CATALOGUE

# *CATALOGUE*

1. BOY WITH PARROT, 1905. *Bronze. H. 12½ inches. Marble Base.*

2. PAN, 1905. *Bronze. H. 14¼ inches. Marble Base.*

3. PAGANISM, 1907. *Marble. H. 22 inches. Base: W. 17 inches, D. 21 inches.*

4. FOUNTAIN, 1910. *Reduction, Bronze. H. 53 inches, W. 46 inches.*

   Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

   Full Size: Marble. Height of figures 7 feet.
   Location: McGill University Campus, Montreal, Canada.

   Full Size Replica: Bronze.
   Location: Lima, Peru.

5. WHEREFORE, 1910. *Bronze Replica. H. 18 inches.*

   Original in the Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

6. THE DANCER, 1910. *Bronze. H. 13½ inches. Marble Base.*

7. SKETCH MODEL FOR MONUMENT TO A SCULPTOR, 1910.
   *Bronze. H. 14½ inches. Marble Base.*

8. SHEILA, 1911. *Bronze. H. 22½ inches. Marble Base.*

9. SPANISH PEASANT, 1911. *Bronze. Life Size. Marble Base.*
Original in the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

10. ATHLETE, 1912. *Grey Italian Marble. H. 42 inches.*
*Base: W. 17½ inches, D. 13 inches.*

11. PORTRAIT HEAD OF ATHLETE, 1912. *Bronze. H. 17 inches.*
*Base: H. 5 inches, W. & D. 5½ inches.*

12. BACCHANTE, 1913. *Bronze. H. 14 inches. Marble Base.*

13. CARYATID, 1913.
*Bronze. H. 19 inches. Marble Base. W. 5½ inches, D. 5¾ inches.*
Replicas: Collection of Anna Hyatt Huntington (Brookgreen Gardens)
Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

14. TITANIC MEMORIAL, 1914.
*Reduction in Plaster. H. 5 feet, W. 5 feet.*
Full scale Monument: Westerly Granite. H. 15 feet.
Location: Potomac Park, Washington, D. C.

15. CHINOISE, 1914. *Limestone. H. 61 inches.*
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

16. HEAD FOR TITANIC MEMORIAL, 1915.
*Seravezza Marble. H. 12¾ inches.*
*Base: H. 7 inches, W. 7 inches, D. 7½ inches.*
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Replica in Black Marble.
Collection of the Luxembourg Museum, Paris.

17. FLORA, 1917. *Bronze. H. 17 inches. Marble Base.*

18. BARBARA, 1917. *Bronze. H. 20 inches. Marble Base.*

19. JO DAVIDSON, 1917. *Bronze. H. 20 inches. Marble Base.*

20. CAPTAIN GUARDABASSI, 1917 *Bronze. H. 25 inches. Marble Base.*

21. COLONEL X, 1917. *Bronze. H. 23 inches. Marble Base.*

22. REFUGEES, 1918. *Bronze. H. 13½ inches. Marble Base.*

23. HONORABLY DISCHARGED, 1918.
*Bronze. H. 22 inches. Marble Base.*

24. ORDERS, 1918. *Bronze. H. 24 inches. Marble Base.*

25. RED CROSS NURSE, 1918. *Bronze. H. 18½ inches. Marble Base.*

26. CHATEAU THIERRY, 1918-20. *Bronze. H. 17 inches. Marble Base.*

27. ENGINEER, 1918-20.
*Bronze. H. 31½ inches. Base: W. 36 inches, D. 21 inches.*

28. PRIVATE IN THE 15TH, 1918-20. *Bronze. H. 14 inches.*

29. VICTORY ARCH PANELS, 1918-20.
*Bronze. H. 24 inches, W. 65 inches.*

30. DETAIL FOR A WAR MEMORIAL, 1918-20.
*Bronze. H. 15 inches. Marble Base.*

31. DOUGHBOY, 1920. *Plaster. H. 36 inches.*

32. FOUND, 1920. *Bronze. H. 18½ inches. Marble Base.*

33. STILL AT HIS POST, 1920. *Bronze. H. 14½ inches. Marble Base.*

34. THE LAST CHARGE, 1920. *Bronze. H. 16½ inches. Marble Base.*

35. GASSED, 1920. *Bronze. H. 20 inches. Marble Base.*

36. BUNKIES, 1920. *Bronze. H. 18 inches. Marble Base.*

37. SPIRIT OF THE RED CROSS, 1920. *Bronze. H. 25 inches. Marble Base.*

38. AVIATOR, 1920. *Bronze. H. 16 inches. Marble Base.*

39. THE SHEPHERD, 1921. *Bronze. H. 7 feet.*

40. WASHINGTON HEIGHTS WAR MEMORIAL, 1921.
*Working Model in Bronze. H. 29 inches.*
*Base: W. and D. 30 inches. Marble Base.*
Full Size Monument: Bronze. Figures life size.
Location: 168th Street and Broadway, New York City.

41. HEAD OF NUN, 1922. *Bronze. H. 11½ inches. Belgian Black Marble Base: H. 7½ inches, W. and D. 6 inches.*

42. BUFFALO BILL—EQUESTRIAN STATUE, 1922.
*Working Model in Plaster. H. 36 inches.*
Full Size: Bronze. H. 8 feet.
Location: Cody, Wyoming.

43. THE LAW, 1922. *Stone. H. 50 inches. Base: W. 19 inches. D. 19 inches.*

44. WAR MEMORIAL PROJECT, 1922. *Plaster.*
*Figure A: H. 37 inches.*
*Figure B: H. 28 inches, W. 42 inches, D. 31 inches.*

45. ST. NAZAIRE MONUMENT, 1924.

*Reduction in Bronze. H. including base 42 inches.*

Full Size: Bronze. H. including base 70 feet.
Location: St. Nazaire, France.

46. FERDINAND AND ISABELLA, 1928-29.

*Detail of Columbus Monument*
*Working Model in Plaster. H. 33 inches.*
*Base: W. 32 inches, D. 20½ inches.*

Full Size Monument: Native Granite. Figure of Columbus: H. 70 feet; Base: 44 feet.
Location: Palos, Spain.

47. UNEMPLOYED, 1932. *Plaster. H. 34 inches.*

48. DAPHNE, 1933. *Bronze. H. 58 inches.*

49. PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN, 1934.

*Bronze. H. 18 inches. Marble Base.*

50. DEVOTION, 1934. *Tennessee Marble. H. 65 inches.*

51. NUN, 1934. *Italian Marble. H. 32 inches.*
*Base: W. 13 inches, D. 12½ inches.*

52. GWENDOLYN, 1934. *Belgian Black Marble. H. 21 inches.*

53. MERCY, 1934. *Plaster. H. 56 inches.*

54. WOMAN AND CHILD, 1935. *Rosso Antico Marble. H. 36 inches. Base: W. 13 inches, D. 9½ inches.*

55. JOHN—Portrait Head, 1935. *Bronze. H. 18 inches. Belgian Black Marble Base.*

56. JOHN—Statuette, 1935. *Bronze. H. 13½ inches.*

57. PAN—Group, 1935. *Plaster. H. 27 inches.*

58. SKETCH FOR THE KISS, 1935. *Plaster. H. 15 inches.*

59. THE KISS, 1935. *Champville Marble. H. 44 inches. Base: W. 20 inches, D. 10½ inches.*

60. GENERAL VANDERBILT, 1935.
*Bronze. H. 18 inches. Belgian Black Marble Base: H. 10½ inches, W. 8½ inches, D. 5 inches.*

61. PETER STUYVESANT, 1938. *Replica in Plaster. Figure: H. 7 feet. Base: H. 4 feet.*
Monument: Bronze.
Location: Stuyvesant Square, New York City.

62. SPIRIT OF FLIGHT, 1938. *Working Model in Plaster. One quarter scale.*
Full Size: Height overall 70 feet.
Base width 50 feet.
Wingspread 20 feet.
Figures 11 feet high.
Location: World's Fair, New York, 1939-40

# ILLUSTRATIONS

BOY WITH PARROT, 1905 BRONZE

FOUNTAIN, 1910 MARBLE

McGill University, Montreal

WHEREFORE, 1910 BRONZE

Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

SPANISH PEASANT, 1911 BRONZE

Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

TITANIC MEMORIAL, 1914 WESTERLY GRANITE

Washington, D. C.

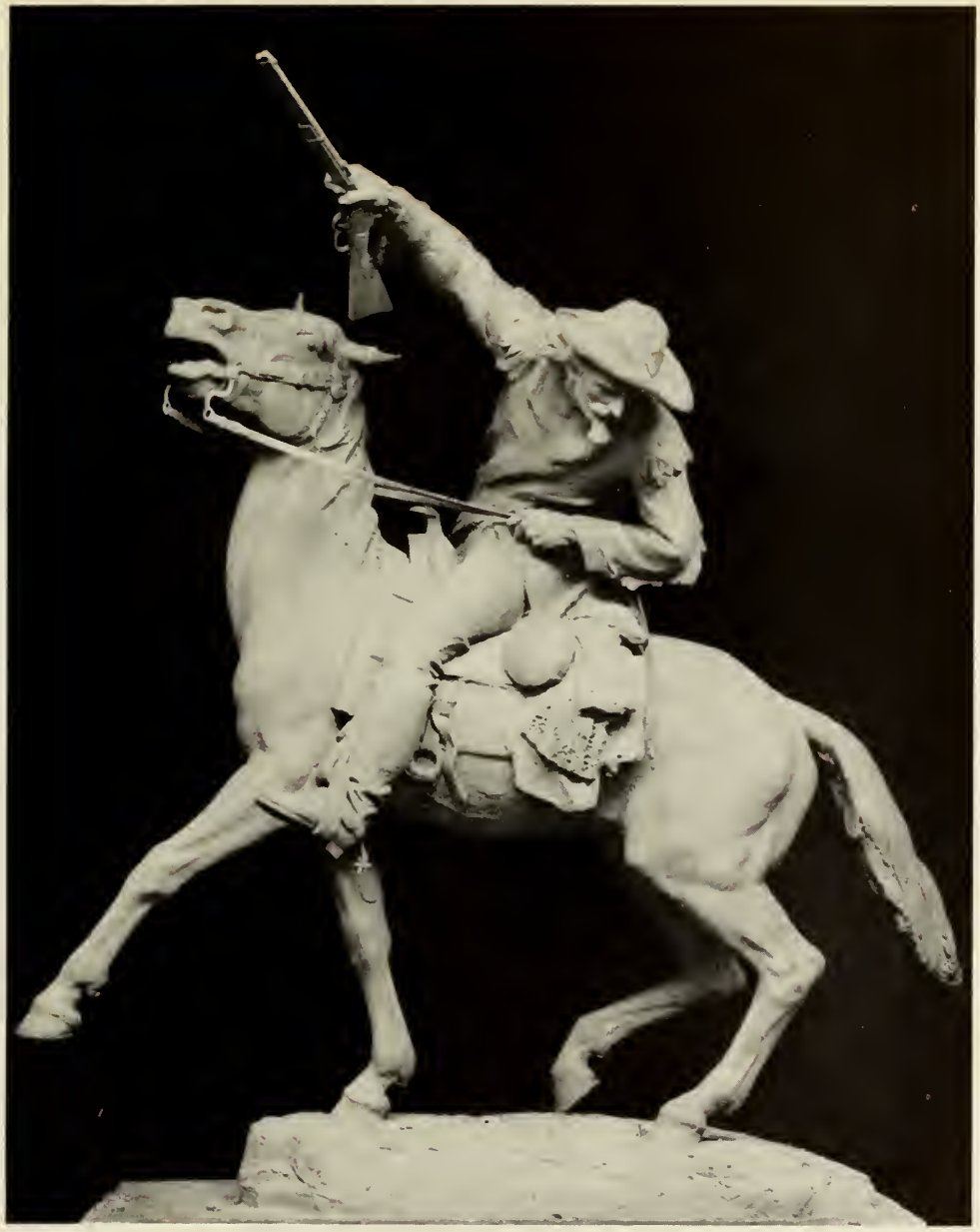
CHINOISE, 1914 LIMESTONE

Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

HONORABLY DISCHARGED, 1918 BRONZE

DOUGHBOY, 1920 PLASTER

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS WAR MEMORIAL, 1921 BRONZE
New York City



BUFFALO BILL, 1922 BRONZE

Cody, Wyoming

ST. NAZAIRE MONUMENT, FRANCE, 1924 BRONZE

COLUMBUS MONUMENT, 1928-29 NATIVE GRANITE
Palos, Spain

UNEMPLOYED, 1932 PLASTER

DEVOTION, 1934 TENNESSEE MARBLE

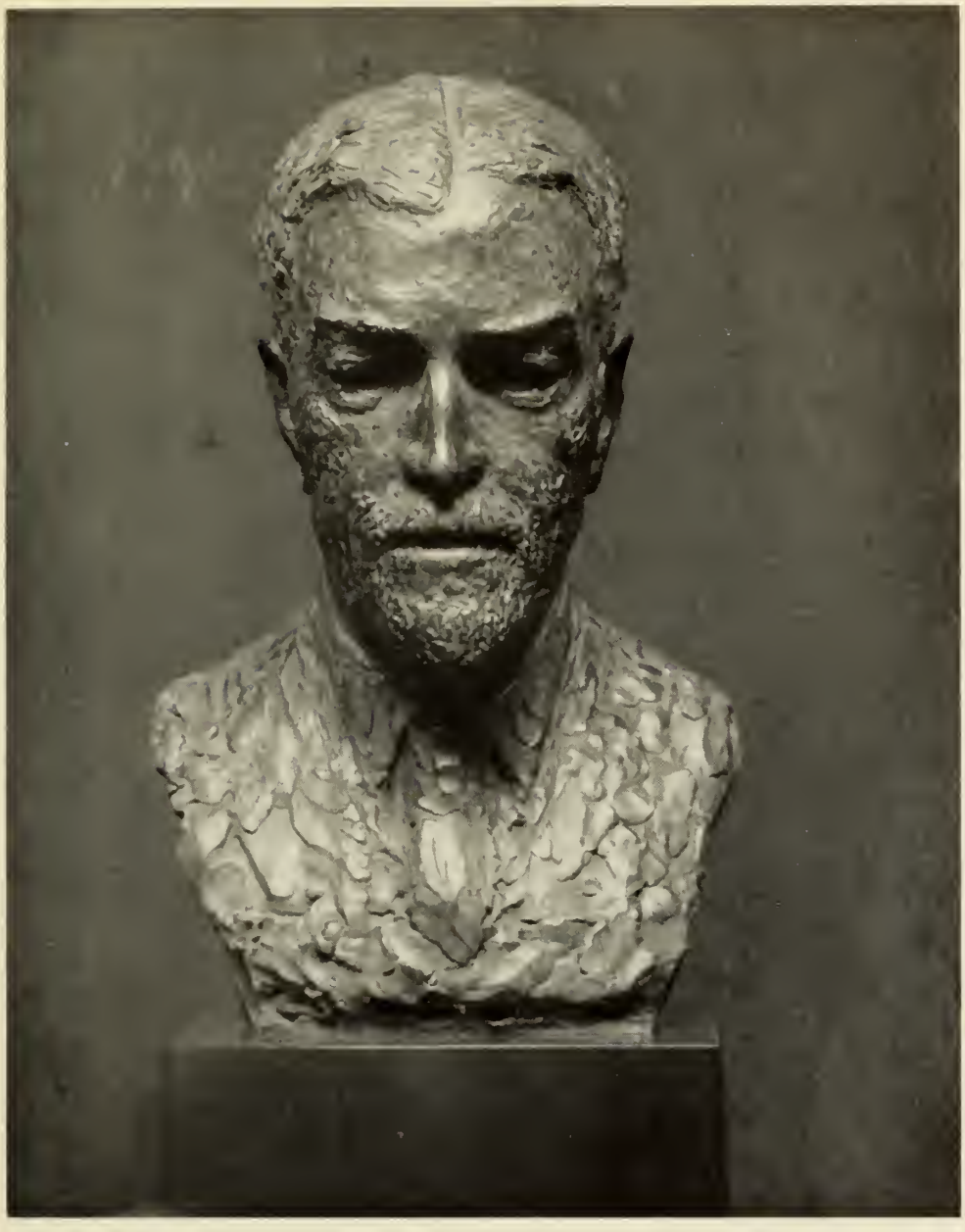
NUN, 1934 ITALIAN MARBLE

GWENDOLYN, 1934 BLACK MARBLE

WOMAN AND CHILD, 1935 MARBLE

JOHN, 1935 BRONZE

THE KISS, 1935 MARBLE



GENERAL VANDERBILT, 1935 BRONZE

PETER STUYVESANT, 1938 BRONZE

Stuyvesant Square, N. Y.

SPIRIT OF FLIGHT, 1939 PLASTER OVERLAID WITH METAL LEAF
World's Fair, New York, 1939-40

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